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OO RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR
DE RUEHRH #0795/01 1661448
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 151448Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0987
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA IMMEDIATE 1659

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000795

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/09/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SA](#) [YE](#)

SUBJECT: YEMENI AMBASSADOR ON GUANTANAMO DETAINEES AND JUNE
8 GCC MINISTERIAL

REF: SANAA 1015

Classified By: CDA AMBASSADOR RICHARD ERDMAN,
reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

1. (S) According to Yemeni Ambassador Al-Ahwal, President Saleh, during his late May meeting with King Abdullah in Riyadh, while professing to prefer that Yemeni Guantanamo detainees be returned to Yemen, said Yemen "wouldn't mind" if another country accepted them due to Yemen's lack of resources and facilities. The King, in turn, made clear to Saleh that Saudi Arabia preferred the detainees be returned to Yemen. Ahwal was subsequently quoted in the Saudi press as confirming that no agreement had been reached on returning Yemeni detainees to Saudi Arabia. On the June 8 GCC Ministerial in Riyadh, Ahwal told Charge that Yemen asked GCC take an additional 500,000 Yemeni workers and proposed a Red Sea countries, conference to deal with Somali piracy. In the wake of Yemen's arrest of the leading al-Qaeda financier for Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Ahwal was quoted in the June 15 Saudi press as confirming that "Saudi-Yemeni security coordination is in place," would continue, and was "manifested in the exchange of information and detainees." End Summary.

NO AGREEMENT REACHED ON
SAUDIS TAKING YEMENI DETAINEES

2. (S) Yemeni Ambassador Mohammed Al-Ahwal was quoted in the June 14 Saudi press as confirming that President Saleh, during his late May visit to Riyadh, had discussed the issue of Yemeni Guantanamo detainees with King Abdullah, but that no agreement had yet been reached (about Saudi Arabia accepting these detainees). Privately, in separate comments to the Charge and DCM, Ahwal made clear that King Abdullah was not prepared to accept Yemeni detainees and wanted them returned to Yemen. Saleh told the King he preferred to have the detainees returned to Yemen, Ahwal added, but said Yemen would need money and would need to decide "how to keep" the detainees and "find people who can talk to them," i.e., new holding facilities and prisoner rehabilitation experts. With the Saudi prisoner rehabilitation program clearly in mind, Saleh told the King that if another country were willing to take the Yemeni detainees, the Yemeni government "wouldn't mind." (Comment: This account suggests that Saleh, sensing that the Saudis were not ready to agree to take the detainees, stopped short of a direct request.)

SALEH'S OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

3. (C) Al-Ahwal insisted that relations with Saudi Arabia were "very good." Saleh's June 2 visit was his second in six

months. He had come principally to thank the King for his unwavering support for Yemeni unification in the face of Houthi and southern rebels cooperating with Al-Qaeda. At the moment "everything was under control" in Yemen. He had also come to seek Saudi support for Yemen's request that the GCC take an additional 500,000 Yemeni workers, noting that there were now about a million Yemeni workers already in Saudi Arabia.) Finally, Yemen wanted support for its proposal to convene a conference of countries bordering the Red Sea to support the provisional Somali government's efforts to combat piracy.

YEMENI GCC REQUEST

14. (C) Al-Ahwal said that following up on Saleh's visit, Yemeni Foreign Minister Qirbi had attended a GCC ministerial meeting held in Riyadh June 8 to press the Yemeni request that GCC members allow 500,000 Yemenis to work in their countries. The foreign ministers decided to refer the matter to the GCC's Labor Ministers for further study. While the Saudis didn't respond to the Yemeni request, Al-Ahwal felt they were supportive of having the matter further studied.

CONTINUING SAUDI-YEMENI
COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION

15. (U) June 15 Saudi press reported Yemeni Interior Ministry's announcement that Hassan Hussein Alwan, a Saudi national and a leading financier for al-Qaeda in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, was arrested two days earlier in eastern Yemen.

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Yemeni Ambassador Ahwal was quoted in the Saudi press as saying that "Saudi-Yemeni security coordination is in place, and manifested in the exchange of information and detainees." "Cooperation between the two countries will continue to fight terrorism," Ahwal added.
ERDMAN